

A Strike from the Right (1)

The Orthodox way of life is always characterized by being balanced. Perhaps we know that the word “Orthodox” in the original Greek literally means “straight glory” implying “accurate worship,” so our Orthodoxy should not have any deviation to the right nor to the left.

In the Absolution of the Priests (a prayer said by priests before the start of the Liturgy and found in the Agpeya), we pray for the fathers of the church and the servants saying: **“Let security, peace, love and stability be among them. Subdue the evil enemy under their feet and our feet. Do not allow him to have any part in them or in us, neither by strikes from the left nor strikes from the right”.**

The strikes from the left are the commonly known sins such as theft, lying, murder, adultery, hate, etc. As for the “strikes from the right” they are the sins of pride, self-exaltation, being puffed up against others and judging them. And the Fathers teach us that “the strikes from the right” are no less dangerous to the soul than those strikes from the left (i.e the “more obvious” sins), rather these sins could be more devastating and much more difficult to heal.



The strike from the right begins where a person is “wise in their own eyes” and thus neglects the counsel of their Father of Confession. The devil will utilize this situation and will convince the person that they are on the right path and will slowly draw them away from the counsel and guidance of their father of confession).

The strike from the right is characterized by an aspiration to greatness, popularity and great achievements... and perhaps St. Paul was warning about this extreme way of thinking when gave this wise advice **“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith”** (Romans 12:3) which means that no one should aspire to things that are beyond their capabilities, in order to be bigger and greater than others. For the deadly sin of pride is hidden within these aspirations, and that is why St. Paul continues later in the same chapter and says **“Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion”** (Romans 12:16).

The strike from the right is usually characterized in most cases by overzealous asceticism such as extreme fasting, numerous prostrations and unduly long prayers. The devil might convince a person that in this way, they are subduing the “old man” and nurturing “the new inner man” when in reality this person is being deceived and actually doing the opposite: **for extreme asceticism actually nurtures the “old man” i.e. the ego, so one becomes puffed up by asceticism and sees themselves as greater than many others,** just like the Pharisee who prayed a long prayer in which he showed that he believed he was better than everyone else, even though in reality his prayer was not accepted and of no use (Luke 18).

This is the reason why the Desert Fathers said that in our spiritual struggle **“Obedience is better than asceticism, for obedience leads to humility while asceticism may lead to pride”...** and they also said **“if you see a young man ascending to heaven through his own volition, then pull him back by his feet!”** And there are many saying of the Fathers in the “Paradise of the Fathers” which deal with the topic of spiritual discernment, the “middle path,” and obedience to a spiritual father, of which we will mention the next article.

(To be continued)

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